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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ASHGABAT 000652

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN IMPLICATES FRENCH EMBASSY, OSCE
CENTER IN SPY SCANDAL

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMB TRACEY JACOBSON FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND
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Summary

¶1. (C) On June 19, Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov told Ambassador that French Charge Henri Tomasini was implicated in a scheme to foment political unrest in Turkmenistan. Meredov unveiled a complicated story involving a Turkmenistani dissident, foreign journalists, spy gear, & color8 revolution training and diplomatic subterfuge. Meredov informed/forewarned at least four other missions (French, UK, OSCE, Ukraine) about the upcoming evening news broadcast that would reveal details of their collaboration to "foment massive public unrest" in Turkmenistan. The scandal will have a chilling effect on Western efforts to promote freedom of speech and democratic reform, as well as on the willingness of Turkmenistani citizens to interact with foreigners. End Summary.

Ambassador Briefed by Foreign Minister

¶2. (C) The Foreign Minister called Ambassador in on June 19 to describe how Turkmenistan had prevented a foreign-assisted attempt to destabilize the government. Security forces arrested Anakurban Amanklichev for plotting to provoke mass protests at the behest of Turkmen citizen "criminals" in Europe with the assistance of "special services" of some European countries, including Ukraine. Amanklichev had been arrested in January 2003 for fraud and sentenced to five years, but received an early amnesty. Over the past several years, according to Meredov, Amanklichev participated in two training courses in Ukraine on how to provoke mass unrest and undertake other actions against the government. The "criminals" with whom Amanklichev was in contact included Bulgaria-based former Central Bank Deputy and Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation founder Hajiyevev (charged with embezzling millions and coup plotting) and other convicted coup plotters Orazov, Begmedov, Hannamov and Yklimov.

¶3. (C) In March 2006, according to Meredov, two Europeans

with tourist visas came to Turkmenistan from Baku via ferry: UK citizen Stuart Nicholas Hook and French citizen Catherine Berthillier. Amanklichev met them in his car at Turkmenbashi and brought them to Ashgabat, where he showed them housing demolitions, suggesting this was a fruitful area to provoke a mass action. The visitors said they would send him special equipment to help document the demolitions, and then departed for Uzbekistan. In April, the visitors called Amanklichev to say he could pick up the equipment at the French Embassy. Amanklichev met with French DCM (now Charge) Henri Tomasini, who did not turn over the equipment at that time because Amanklichev arrived at the embassy empty handed, he would have to depart without the case in order to avoid suspicion. Tomasini met Amanklichev a few hours later in a French Embassy car on Atamyrat Niyazov Street and handed over a large briefcase containing the promised equipment.

14. (C) Meredov then showed the Ambassador a picture of the equipment -- special glasses (resembling what the U.S. military calls government-issue "birth control glasses") equipped with invisible cameras for still and video recording. Meredov alleged that Amanklichev was instructed to use the glasses not only to photograph potential sources of public discontent but also military facilities, police stations, and special services buildings. Meredov said Amanklichev had taken pictures at the crowded Teke Bazaar and made a photo-montage of destroyed housing. He reported back to the "criminals" that the people in the bazaar were all distraught over the demolitions and that this was a good source of public protest.

15. (C) Meredov also claimed that Amanklichev received instructions and sent information abroad with the assistance of RFE/Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation contacts Ogulsapar

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Myradova (sister of Hajiyevev in Bulgaria) and Anadurdy Hajiyevev. He insisted that Myradova,s adult children were involved, which is why they were arrested.

16. (C) Meredov said he called Tomasini in for an explanation. Initially, Tomasini claimed not to know what Meredov was talking about, but after Meredov showed him the pictures, Tomasini admitted that though he may have given some equipment to a journalist, he did not really know what the equipment was. Meredov chastised him, saying "this is not a kindergarten." He said the Government of Turkmenistan valued its relationship with France, and therefore had no plans to declare Tomasini persona non grata.

Ambassador Highlights Transparency

17. (C) Ambassador pointed out that the USG conducted various training programs with activists and civil society leaders, but these were directed at how to work as civil organizations, how to better work with local government, etc.) and not/not how to do anything secretly. Ambassador also said the glasses looked like something out of a bad 1960's spy movie. She urged Meredov to ensure that the ensuing investigations and court cases were open and transparent, and that they fully complied with international norms, including access to counsel. Because the USG had a particular interest due to Myradovs/Hajiyevev's connection to RFE/RL, she asked that the GOTX share any hard evidence it had against them.

The Televised Denouement

18. (SBU) Immediately following the June 19 2100 (local) broadcast of the Cabinet of Ministers meeting, the broadcast continued with a special session with Niyazov and the heads of his security agencies. Niyazov listened impassively to Minister of National Security Geldimuhammet Ashyrmuhammedov,s equally impassively-told tale of Amanklichev,s foiled attempt to foment a revolution after

being trained in the Ukraine and assisted by diplomats in Turkmenistan. Asyrmuhammedov mentioned by name French Charge Tomasini and also stated that OSCE human dimensions officer Benjamin Moreau was involved. Niyazov appeared placid, but pleased, with the investigation read verbatim from a written report. Niyazov ordered the press to initiate a campaign to expose any people who were against the government and the country, and told Ashyrmuhammedov to &find them all,8 including any diplomats who might be involved in such shenanigans.

According to French, Spy Specs Standard Journalistic Tool

¶9. (C) Ambassador met with French Charge Henri Tomasini on June 20. Tomasini was visibly shaken, but bolstered by communications he had from Paris overnight. He admitted to providing the equipment to Amanklichev on instructions from his ministry's press department. The two Europeans cited by the GOTX (Bertilier and Hook) are correspondents with the Galaxie Presse, and had asked for and received permission from the French MFA's press department to transfer the camera glasses via diplomatic pouch to their contact in Turkmenistan in order to report on developments in the country. (Note: No information exists to confirm that Amanklichev is a published journalist. End Note.) Tomasini had a demarche from Paris which he hoped to deliver to the Foreign Minister later on June 20, stating that France provided the equipment as a form of journalistic technical assistance, and it had no other purpose. The French demarche also calls on Turkmenistan to stand by its commitments to freedom of expression under the UN Human Rights agreement.

Ukraine: Not a Training Camp for Democratic Reformers

¶10. (C) Ukrainian DCM Valeriy Vasilyev told DCM on June 20 he had been summoned by Meredov at 2130 on June 19 (in the

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middle of the Ukraine-Saudi Arabia World Cup match). According to Vasilyev, Meredov accused the Government of Ukraine of "training Turkmen in your Orange Revolution methods" in Donetsk. Vasilyev said he told Meredov he would not dignify the baseless allegation with an answer, and furthermore there was no such thing as "Orange Revolution Methods Training." Vasilyev said he told Meredov he thought it strange that one man, Amanklichev, could have successfully put together such a complicated plot, including the Ukrainians, the French, and the OSCE; to which Meredov replied "he was not alone, there were others."

¶11. (C) Vasilyev told DCM he considered the whole incident a "trumped up affair" and thought it likely Amanklichev was an "agent provocateur" set up by the government to discredit the West. Vasilyev said he was proud Ukraine was now considered part of the "western camp" of democratic reformers. He also noted that it probably was not a coincidence that the announcement came on the heels of GAZPROM Executive Director Miller's visit and that accusing Ukraine of running "Orange Revolution Training Camps" increasingly was part of Russia's black propaganda campaign in Central Asia. He agreed that the audience for this incident was the local public who, as a result, would be increasingly reluctant to interact with any foreigners.

OSCE Cautious, No Formal Response

¶12. (SBU) PolOffs met with OSCE Center in Ashgabat with Acting OSCE Head of Office Dieter Matthei and human dimensions officer Benjamin Moreau on June 20. Matthei characterized the situation as &a case under development8 and refused to make any statement absent official notification and charges. He expressed total confidence in his colleague,s above-board conduct, stating that Moreau

was, &always careful, and he knows his business well -- all actions were received and documented.8 Matthei firmly declined to speculate as to the reasons behind the public accusation of OSCE, but acknowledged that alleged RFE/RL stringer Myradova had regular contact with the OSCE. The OSCE &has an open door) anyone who wants to meet with us can do so.8 (Note: The case against Amanklichev also includes participation in an OSCE-sponsored human rights conference in Warsaw. End note.).

Questions at DCM,s Residence

¶13. (C) Probably not coincidentally on June 19 a representative from the municipal government spoke with DCM's gardener (and next door neighbor), and asked him if he had seen anything suspicious going on at the DCM's residence. The gardener told the DCM that he had responded, "What do I know? I'm just a gardener, and I look after her kid every now and then, I don't ask any questions." The representative requested the gardener to report anything suspicious immediately.

Comment

¶14. (C) The ill-advised French move to supply a local journalist with equipment in every way resembling spy gear has given the government a welcome hook to round up a number of individuals who have contact with Western news and opposition organizations, and to send a chilling message to regular citizens in Turkmenistan about the consequences of contacts with foreigners. Tomasini and Moreau may or may not be asked to leave, but in any case, the French have played into the hands of an already paranoid and xenophobic regime by supplying this bizarre equipment and as a result, seriously undermined the ability of all Western and international organizations -- as well as local independent journalists or non-governmental organizations -- to promote human rights and freedom of expression. End Comment.

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